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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the establishment of social policy and social action programs for children is presented. The position is taken that current efforts in this direction are based on outmoded hypotheses. Programs over the past 10 years have denigrated poor children by saying that the mind is plastic and that everybody can and should be smart. It was believed that if these children were given the right experiences, they could be smart as their more fortunate middle and upper class counterparts. Other injustices done to these children was to hold that they suffer from sensory deprivation and to insist that their real problem was an intellectual deficiency. The current movement to institute nationwide preschool education is criticized. It is concluded that social policy can not be constructed on the basis of questionable psychological theorizing. (CK)

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Is Our Evolving Social Policy for Children Based on Fact or Fiction?

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Early childhood education practices have been built upon an ever-changing theoretical edifice. We still do not have all of the wisdom necessary to totally understand the very intricate and interesting process of child development. Nevertheless, our children cannot wait for us to discover all there is to know before we launch critical social action programs in their behalf. What we must be careful of is that we launch such programs on the basis of the soundest psychological knowledge and theorizing available to us. Unfortunately, as I examine our current efforts, I come to the conclusion that this is not the case. What troubles me is that we currently appear to be establishing social policy on the basis of a particular set of hypotheses and hunches that was quite popular 10 years ago but, in my estimation, has proven to be inadequate.

The point of view that still seems to underlie most of our social policy efforts is a position advanced in the early '60's. That point of view I would describe as a naive and overly optimistic environmentalism which emphasized the tremendous plasticity of the very young child. This position was itself a counterthrust to the earlier nonsensical position that viewed heredity and maturation as the end-all of development. Unfortunately, the thinking in this country concerning child development resembles a pendulum. We seem to go too far in one direction and then we go too far in the other direction. In the early '60's workers rejected the Gesellian tradition and the hereditarian emphasis. We turned instead to a position which essentially ignored the wholeness and biological integrity of children and emphasized almost entirely the plasticity of their cognitive systems. Not only was the cognitive

system plastic, but this system was all that seemed to matter to us. The whole child--his personality, motivation and so forth--simply did not concern us very much. While I realize the error in concentrating too heavily on the cognitive determinants of a child's behavior, I did find some value in the plasticity position. It was a healthy antidote to the nonsense of earlier decades. Furthermore, it gave rise to an optimistic rather than pessimistic view of the child within which we began seeking and mounting those programs which held some promise for optimizing children's development.

Not only the excesses of the plasticity view but the view in its entirety are now under counterattack. I am convinced that any kind of ideological excess in our theorizing must give way to an ideological excess in the opposite direction, and I think we are beginning to see this happen now. That is to say, it is my view that those who are now arguing that a good preschool program hurts children are being just as nonsensical as those who suggested that, through some combination of cognitive plasticity and critical periods, a preschool program would solve all the problems of the non-achieving child.

We have all lived through the overoptimism and the overpromises of the naive environmentalism that I am now criticizing. In the past 10 years, we have been absolutely deluged with curricula, programs and gadgetry which, when applied to a child in his early years, could guarantee normal, if not superior, intelligence. We acted as though the biological law of human variability had been repealed. In an early compensatory program in New York, we discovered 10-point IQ changes in children. This was picked up by the newspapers in New York City with a

banner headline: "Program Increases Child's IQ One Point Per Month." Everyone was tempted to send their children to such centers for 30 or 40 month's worth. We saw, and unfortunately continue to see, scientists taking their very early hypotheses to the popular press before they have any very convincing scientific evidence. I remember a leading spokesman for the plasticity position who, in a Reader's Digest article, gave advise to parents on "How to Raise Your Child's IQ 20 Points." Headlines and book titles went on and on: "Give Your Child a Superior Mind," "Teach Your Child to Read at Two." Heaven only knows why a child would want to read at two anyway. There are so many interesting and important developmental tasks that he should be tackling instead. The whole idea embraced a strong Lockian point of view. The young child was an empty organism; and, if we could just plug in this experience and that experience, we could shape him to become a genius.

Looking back at some of our early formulations about programs, including Head Start, (which, by the way, I think is a very successful program), we made some serious errors which did not emanate directly from this point of view but are associated with it. In these early programs we denigrated poor children by saying that the mind is plastic and that everybody can and should be smart. Some children are not intelligent because they have been deprived. Therefore, if we could just give these children the right experiences, they can be smart too. How did we determine which children needed our help? Did we do this on the basis of their capabilities? No, we simply assumed that if a family had an income of under $3,900 a year, their children were not bright so we should apply this new magic we had discovered. If a family made $4,100 a year, their children were bright and did not need our help.

We should never allow ourselves to make this mistake again. We mounted programs on the basis of socioeconomic class, not on the basis of children's psychological characteristics and capacities. We acted as though children were homogeneous in terms of their psychological features. I think that this is an erroneous assumption to make, especially with young children. We must appreciate individual variation at every socioeconomic class level. It is easily demonstrated that children of the poor represent every range within the intellectual dimension. Some are dull, some are average, and some are very bright. It is not impossible to find children among the poor with IQs of 200.

What then was the theoretical basis for treating poor children as though they universally suffered from lack of intelligence? The basis was and still is a model that has never been thought through adequately, namely the deprivation model. We began by saying that the poor suffer from "cultural deprivation," but then it dawned on someone that it is absolutely impossible for a living, human organism to suffer from cultural deprivation. Everyone has a culture. You cannot label someone culturally deprived simply because his culture is not like yours.

So we went to the next step and said that the poor suffer from some kind of sensory deprivation. Although this fit the cognitive theorizing that was going on at the time, we did not engage in what I consider sound reasoning or sound experimental work. We used the loosest form of analogizing and called it theory. What I am alluding to is the repeated reference to the sensory deprivation work done with animals by Hebb, Riesen and others. Briefly, they found that if an animal is raised under sensorially deprived conditions and then put in a learning

situation, he does not learn as quickly as an animal raised under natural laboratory conditions. Many quickly assumed that sensory deprivation was the problem with our poor children; thus, we had to develop programs for them to make up for this sensory deprivation. This viewpoint was very widely accepted until we attempted to document the sensory deprivation experienced by ghetto children. When we went into the homes of the poor, we certainly did not encounter sensory deprivation. Instead, we found the television going, windows open with sounds coming in from the street, three or four siblings climbing over each other, and neighbors coming in and out.

This refutation of expectation did not slow down those who would like simple answers to complex problems. Some insisted that the problem was "too much sensory input." Buried in such loose explanations is probably a rather sound theoretical construct, namely optimal sensory input. However, much more experimental work would have to be done before such a concept could be advanced as particularly relevant to the problems of children, both poor and rich, who do not intellectually achieve. Arguing that the poor child receives too little or too much sensory input is simply to circumvent the scientific process necessary in order to give the sensory input factor any real explanatory power.

Another great injustice we did to poor children was to insist that their real problem was an intellectual deficiency. What this meant is that they did not do very well on our tests, be it tests of concept formation, language ability, etc. Furthermore, we assumed this test performance to be an inexorable readout of the cognitive system. Since we drew no distinction between a child's performance and his capacity, we

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concluded that the basic problem of poor children was a cognitive deficiency. I have always felt that the greatest problem confronting poor children in this country is not an intellectual deficit, but a motivational structure produced by their life experiences, which interferes with their ability to perform up to the cognitive level that they are capable of. We must make a clear distinction between a cognitive deficit and a performance deficit. The need for this distinction is becoming more and more obvious. Very recently, workers have found that the great language deficit of black children vanishes pretty quickly if one takes the trouble of getting down on the floor with them with some potato chips and acting like a human being. A year or so ago, Bruner and Cole demonstrated how cultural factors rather than cognitive inadequacy can very seriously attenuate children's performance. My own research has shown that there are probably 10 points of unused IQ in poor children which they simply do not apply in testing situations, or for that matter in school situations, because of a variety of motivational factors which interfere with their performance.

Nonetheless, the most popular position currently remains the unbridled environmentalism of the '60's. A spokesman for this position continues to report findings of IQ changes of over 40 points in one study and over 70 points in another. He optimistically views 75 points as the possible variation in an individual's intelligence test scores. Expecting such IQ increases strikes me as being unrealistic; we must therefore examine closely the evidence on which such conclusions are based. They are based on studies of infants which employed not intelligence quotients but developmental quotients. These scores involve a

variety of behavioral bench marks observed over the course of development and incorporated in a variety of infant tests. Many of you are familiar with how such scores are obtained. Let us assume that there is a behavioral bench mark that appears in the average child at the age of six months. If the bench mark behavior and others like it appear in a child at six months of age, the child receives a developmental quotient of 100. However, if we intervene in the life of an infant in such a way as to cause the bench mark behavior to appear at three months, the calculation of the developmental quotient will result in a DQ score of 200. In other words, we have raised the quotient by 100 points. But have we really? What does it actually mean that six-month behaviors come in at three months? What is the relationship between this interesting accelerated appearance of certain bench mark behaviors and the intelligence of the child during the school years? What is rarely pointed out is that the relationship between when these bench mark behaviors occur in infancy and later intelligence is essentially zero. The time when the bench mark behavior comes is unimportant as a preditor of later intelligence or an indication that the child's rate of cognitive development has been changed in a meaningful fashion.

But we did go through a period of absolute euphoria about what we could do with young children. There is no question that Head Start was the Sesame Street of 1965. I remember standing next to President Johnson in the Rose Garden at the White House when he announced that Head Start would be extended from a six- or eight-week program to a one-year program. To paraphrase him, he said, "This summer we had 550,000 children in Head Start, and as a result we will have 550,000 tax paying citizens. Otherwise

we would have had 550,000 more people on welfare." Did we actually believe that in just six or eight weeks we could inoculate a child against the future ravages of deprivation? This is the plasticity position gone mad! How do you blame presidents or governors or any decision maker responsible to the people? The job was made to appear so simple by some experts and the outcome so appealing that it just had to become part of our social policy.

The euphoria did not last very long. Soon after the first summer a smattering of reports appeared which took us somewhat aback. In New York, Wolfe reported finding no lasting IQ effects as a result of Head Start. We dismissed the Wolfe report by simply pointing to all of its methodological problems. Yet it is one thing to say this is a bad study and another to say that the opposite is true and there are long-lasting IQ effects. We were prone to do that sort of thing. Scientists are human, and we did want the program to work. But soon we began to get other reports, such as the Westinghouse Report. It, too, had a lot of methodological problems, and I was one of its critics. But clearly, we were not getting a huge pay-off in terms of intellectual development.

Unfortunately, intellectual development became the goal of Head Start. Although such an objective was never intended, it is easy to see how it came about. We never made clear to the nation what we were trying to do and how we were trying to do it. We let journalists tell us that we were in the business of raising IQ scores. Let this be a lesson. The goals of a program must be made explicit at the very beginning. If they are not, the program will be evaluated in terms of goals other than its own. This is what happened to Head Start. If Head Start is evaluated on

the basis of the explicit goals of the program when it began--the health of children, involvement of parents, putting poor people to work, and so on--there is no question that the program was a success. If evaluated in terms of its ability to raise IQ scores, the program was much less than a booming success. It is inappropriate to assess Head Start that way, but it happened.

After our initial disappointment with Head Start, new analyses and interpretations appeared. In 1969, Larry Kohlberg wrote that we were expecting too much of such programs as Head Start. Given the very nature of cognitive development, how much do we really think it can be changed as a result of a one-year intervention? Take Piaget seriously. But Piaget has become a Rorschach in this area; everyone finds in Piaget what they want to. While Kohlberg was quoting Piaget to show that short-term compensatory programs had little effect on cognitive development, Hunt was quoting Piaget to say they would have an effect. As far as I am concerned, Piaget is neutral on this point. Nonetheless, my view is that Kohlberg's analysis is very scholarly and should be seriously considered.

Other analyses appeared. Shep White at Harvard concluded that the cognitive system is not as plastic as we had assumed. The coup de grace was Bereiter's little-read paper which appeared in the Johns Hopkins Symposium. Bereiter presented evidence which lead him to the conclusion that it is simply a waste of time to try and promote cognitive development at the preschool level. We might as well wait until the child is in the first grade and apply our effort there. Although some of us may not want to hear that sort of thing, we should force ourselves to at least look at what the other side is saying. I find in Bereiter's paper data and a design for evaluation that we should take most seriously.

Finally, OCD commissioned a good friend of early childhood education, Urie Bronfenbrenner, to critique all the programs to date in terms of how permanent were the cognitive gains they demonstrated after the first year. Bronfenbrenner's paper, which I assume OCD will have available in the near future, does not present an optimistic picture. He points out a fairly simple thing. It is not as though the intellect is unchangeable or is not plastic, but we must try better and harder than is possible in a one-year program. He concludes that there may be much greater pay-off if we were to work with parents rather than with children inasmuch as parents influence their children for a good number of years. Certainly, the continuous effort of a parent would outdistance anything we could realistically expect through a one-year preschool compensatory program. Bronfenbrenner's analysis is an extremely provocative one and I advise you to read it.

Another formulation has become so taken for granted that one feels ridiculous in questioning it at this stage. But questioning is in order. The belief is that the first few years of life represent some magic period during which a child can be inoculated against any and all negative experiences to follow. I see this as a questionable formulation, for the simple reason that every stage, every age, every year in the life of a child is magic and important. In my estimation, it is wrong to claim that, in regard to cognitive development, the early years represent a period of special sensitivity to environmental intervention. What has been lost is the fact that development, including cognitive development, is a continuous process. Such a realization would demand that we be concerned with both the very early years preceding the preschool experience and the

many years of childhood that follow it. In the social policy sphere, recognition of this developmental principle would demand that we offer special programs for high risk children at every stage of their development. This would be a large and expensive commitment for society to make. For this reason, we still prefer to think that there is some magic period and some magic gadget to go along with it. Infancy has become the most recent magic period, as evidenced in the huge amount of work being done in this area. Everyone is studying infancy, as though this is where the problem lies. This has become one of the ways that we handled the frustration and disappointment that so many people found in Head Start. The answer became that we did not intervene soon enough, that we must reach children when they are younger. The parent-child centers were started on this kind of reasoning.

A group of experts reinforced our infatuation with infancy. I remember vividly a picture on the cover of Life magazine of an infant looking up into a visual display. Inside, workers at the Harvard-MIT complex had allowed journalists to quote them as though they had discovered in the first year of life the key to cognitive development. One important worker in that group found that if mobiles were placed over a baby's crib, a few responses or bench marks occurred earlier. Mobiles soon became the rage. We thought we could solve the problems of this country and the problems of the child in school, if we could only put a mobile over every child's crib. I cannot overestimate the anxiety that this view created. Thank God the poor do not read all of this nonsense, but unfortunately the middle class does. The middle class in America represents the most anxious, uptight group of parents to be found anywhere in the world. Some seriously

believed they had hurt their children because they had not known about mobiles earlier.

Although it is hard to re-examine what we already have accepted, let's try and start from square one again. The question is simple: Are the first years of life the years where environmental interventions have their greatest impact? We have all grown up with the notion, "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree." We should intervene in the early years because they are the base for everything that comes later. This idea has a certain seductiveness, but where did it come from? It received considerable impetus with one statement which we are all familiar with: 'Half the learning of a child is over by the age of four." This statement swept the country. Hearing this, what governor or president or public official responsible for social programs for children would not be highly motivated to do something in those four years before it is too late?

The statement is simple and appealing, so we failed to question it. Yet in actuality, we do not know when all cognitive development is over, so how could we know when half of it is over? I do not know what the statement means that half the child's learning is over by the age of four, but I can see where one line of evidence which produced it comes from. It is based on the intercorrelations between tests given to a child at various times in his life. When a child is tested at age six months, and then again at age 10 or 12 years, the correlation between the scores is virtually zero. But when a child's test scores at age two are correlated with his scores at age eight or 10, the relationship jumps up to about .50. The method of predicting a later set of scores from an earlier set (or the degree that the correlation helps you) is to square the correlation.

Squaring the .50 correlation indicates that 25% of the variance in the later scores is predictable from the early scores. Twenty-five percent is not very much, so we do not (or should not) take the IQs of two-year-olds very seriously as predictors of later intelligence. However, comparing scores attained at about four years of age with those attained at age eight or 10, the correlation jumps up to about .70. Squaring .70 yields .49, or nearly 50% of the variance predictable from early scores. Thus we can generate the view that half a person's learning is acquired by age four. This conclusion does not follow at all. I can make an equally illogical conclusion from knowing that .70 is also the correlation between the mid-point of two parents' IQ scores and their children's scores at maturity. Applying the same logic used in the earlier statement, I can conclude that half the child's learning is over before the child is born.

The confusion here results from the fact that correlations do not take into account the nature of development. One developmental phenomenon is that the growth curve of children--be it for physical size, cognitive development, etc.--is a negatively accelerated growth curve. Growth is very rapid, then slows down and levels off. It is true that a lot of changes occur very rapidly in the first four years of life. But many of these changes are guaranteed to us not because of experience, but because of maturation. We must respect the fact that we are members of the human species. This rapid growth takes place over a broad array of experiences in every society and every culture. Just knowing when there are rapid changes does not mean this is when environmental input will have the biggest effect. We must separate those processes which are under the influence of

environmental input from those which are guaranteed through the biological maturation characteristic of our species. The need for such a maturational-experiential ratio is evident from some of our past mistakes. For example, we spent years figuring out how to make children speak. But from Chomsky and others, we learned there is no way to stop them from speaking! Lenneberg's work on the biology of language supports this very nicely. At the age of two or three, children everywhere in the world burst into language regardless of whether they were raised in the woods of New Guinea or a penthouse in Manhattan. With this kind of constancy across such a wide array of environments, we must realize that language begins as a maturational process. It is one of those rapid changes occurring in the early years, but one which can benefit little from environmental input.

I find us guilty of another oversight. As we debate the preschool education issue, we rely heavily on experimental findings and overlook the fact that there are natural laboratories all over the world. Why have we ignored the following phenomena? In France, children go to school at the age of three. In Norway, they go to school at the age of seven. I am not convinced that Norwegians do not do as well in life as the French. The amount of schooling in the early years does not seem to make that much difference.

We have based our social policy on the belief that a child will never recover if he is deprived the proper environmental influence during his early magic years. One proponent of this view was Jerry Kagan, an outstanding child psychologist, theorist, and spokesman for continuity in human development. After spending many months studying children in Guatemala, Dr. Kagan has repudiated his view on the continuity of development

which he held most of his professional life. He found children in Guatemala who had done extremely poorly on tests in infancy and early life because of certain culturally-bound experiences. These children later blossomed forth and were perfectly fine cognitive specimens during their middle childhood years. Here we see that there are stages at every level of life, and because a child does poorly at one stage does not necessarily mean he will do poorly at the next. Kagan saw in Guatemala children who had already flunked one stage, but this failure did not have such a negative impact on them. In many ways, this is an optimistic finding which should lead us to reject the notion that if we do not intervene early enough, the child is lost to us.

All of this leads me to what I have been building up to. There seems to be a movement afoot in this nation to institute universal preschool education. I believe that this appeal, this desire, this thrust is based upon the theorizing I have been criticizing. It is incumbent on the proponents of this movement to state clearly what the goals of such social policy would be. In the absence of any explicit statement, we can only deduce their intentions. I think the implicit goal is pretty obvious--if we just had the child one year earlier, when there is such great plasticity and sensitivity to environmental inputs, the schools would be helped with their problem of the non-learner. I think that this kind of a view is unrealistic, especially if we take Christopher Jencks' findings seriously. If the vast variations within our present 12 years of schooling have as little effect as Jencks has reported, how is one more year at the bottom going to help? It is my view that people are wrong to expect preschool education to drastically reduce school failure. Perhaps I am being

more of a devil's advocate than I should be, but let me state my case broadly so it can be countered. I believe that universal preschool education, a year of school for every child before kindergarten, will not make any dent in the real problems of schools.

I want to be clear on this point, because I am not against early childhood education. Preschool education has recently come under attack as being harmful to children; it is my view that this position is as nonsensical as the view that preschool education will make America a heaven on earth. What we are seeing is what I mentioned earlier--when there are excesses in thought, they engender excesses in thought in the opposite direction. I have looked at the evidence on both sides as to what the harm might be in preschool education. Obviously, a child might be harmed if he goes to a bad nursery school. But by the same token, a child who does not go to nursery school might also be harmed by bad experiences. As long as we are dealing with children beyond the age of three, I find no convincing evidence to support the general conclusion that early childhood education is harmful. If this were the case, people who are supposedly knowledgeable about child development--pediatricians, child psychologists, child psychiatrists--would not send their children to nursery school. Yet I am sure that most of them do. We may not believe the theoretical positions we communicate to one another concerning children in the abstract, but we are careful about our own children.

If we start universal preschool education, I think there will be some gains, but not of the sort that taxpayers will expect. The biggest gains will probably be three in number: (1) Mothers will get some respite from the tough task of mothering. This may very well improve the quality of

their mothering during the time they spend with their children. (2) Children will get something of a head start in their social interaction skills. However, this head start should vanish by the time the child is in the third grade, when most children are fairly well socialized. (3) If the preschool programs are good, they will improve the quality of the lives of children in this country. I think that a child in a good nursery school tends to be happy and has interesting experiences. His life is enriched, and that is not a small matter to me. The correct attitude toward preschool, especially with respect to middle-class children, should be very much like the attitude we have toward giving our children music lessons. By that I mean the lives of our children are made fuller and more interesting, but this does not necessarily have much to do with their playing in Carnegie Hall. Many middle-class parents shop around for nursery schools the same way they shop around for colleges, because the school is supposed to be that first step toward a long path to success.

I do have some reservations about preschool education. The first and most important one is the basic question of cost. Preschool programs have a low pupil/teacher ratio and are therefore expensive. If this society had all of the money in the world, a voluntary universal preschool program would be to my liking. It would create one more choice or possibility to offer our children. But unfortunately, we do not have all of the money in the world. The construction of good social policy involves choosing among alternatives and establishing priorities. When I think of all the problems of children in this country and all the problems of the schools, one more year of early education does not seem terribly important. It should not be a high priority.

Planners of universal preschool say it will be voluntary. I can tell you right now what is going to happen in a voluntary program. More middle-class than lower-class children will be herded into the program, for the simple reason that middle-class parents are tremendously anxious that their children have every benefit. If decision makers and superintendents think something is good for children, middle-class parents want their children to have it. Why must we always rediscover the wheel? In my estimation, we have gone the full route in assessing the value of preschool education for middle-class children. There were several studies conducted in the '30's and '40's which few people note any more. The evidence seems clear that middle-class children who attend nursery school show no cognitive superiority over those who do not attend. Even after one year, the only gain found for the nursery school goers was a small acceleration in social skills. This research shows that by the time the child is in the second or third grade, even this little bit of difference disappears.

Another problem with the universal preschool is that plans are to incorporate it into the present educational establishment. Frankly, I am not overly impressed with the track record of our schools. I am not sure that if we allow them to take on the task of early childhood education, that they will do a very good job with it. For one thing, we have a surplus of teachers. I am very concerned that if we give schools the job of teaching four-year-olds, they will employ the surplus third- or sixth-grade teachers. While this might relieve the unemployment crisis, it will not provide the expertise needed in the early childhood field. I am also concerned that the schools may try and get away with simply adding some more of the same. That is, the easiest thing to do is add something at

the top or at the bottom without changing the established system or practices. I think that it is necessary in American schools for children to optimize themselves, and that concept involves a much more radical change in the nature of schools. I am convinced that our schools can do what they are presently charged to do better. Our money would be better spent in changing the character and quality of the first three grades. This change would probably be more effective and, interestingly enough, less costly than preschool education.

The change in the nature of schools must be built upon what is clear to all of us--the family, not the school, has the greatest influence on the development of children. Three hours in nursery school or five or six hours in a school day clearly cannot have the impact of home life in determining what the child is to become. Schools must quit ignoring this fact and begin developing systems of true school-family cooperation in the education of children. I propose that such cooperation begin long before a child is of school age. There are a lot of things going on in the first few years of life which our schools should direct themselves to. Why wait for a child to come to school at age five with less of a brain than he should have because of protein deficiency he experienced in utero? We must appreciate that education is a developmental phenomenon. If we really want to help children, we must start with pregnant mothers. What we have learned in Home Start and other experimental programs should be incorporated into a program to help parents in their role as parents. Such a program would involve periodic visits to parents and parents rather than children coming to the school during their children's preschool years. There are many things that we can do in the first five years of life to help the

child through his family. The result would be a continuous support system for the child in the home and in the school--a real partnership.

I think that there is a place in America for preschool education, a place that would justify its costs. Tax supported, preschool education should be limited to those children who could clearly profit from such a program. What is required is not a shotgun approach but an individualized approach. Even the rough screening procedures that we now have at our disposal are sufficient for the bulk of the task I have in mind. What happens in this nation that should not be allowed to happen is that many children are lost between the time they leave the hospital as newborns and the time they enter school. If we can develop the parent-school partnership which I have been suggesting, very early in the child's life, children will not be lost. Through home visits and the voiced concerns of parents, we could identify those children who could profit by training or a group experience prior to the normal entry into school. I am thinking here of handicapped children, bilingual children, and children whose homes are of such a nature that the child and parents could profit by the child having a preschool nursery experience. Do not let this last category confuse you. I am not speaking here only of the homes of the poor. We have stigmatized the poor too long and have constructed less than optimal children's programs on the fallacious belief that the children of the poor are universally in need of preschool programs, while more affluent children have absolutely no need for them. It is not a parent's income that should determine the value of a preschool experience; it is rather the needs of the child. The handicapped child, the bilingual child, and even the child from a disorganized home is not to be found only in one socioeconomic class. By organizing

programs around the needs of all children rather than around the incomes of their parents, we will be able to target our efforts more effectively while at the same time being in a position to produce benefits commensurate with costs.

In conclusion, then, we cannot continue to construct social policy for children's programs on the basis of extremely tentative if not downright questionable psychological theorizing. I think that it is time to analyze closely what the problems of children are, what knowledge we really have, what monies are at our disposal, and how the various institutions of our society--families, schools, churches, community centers and organizations, and industry--can cooperate in trying to meet the needs of the children in our country in the most effective manner.